



Exploring the Utility of Social Marketing Techniques in Motivating People to Adopt Healthy Behavior

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Abstract

Over the years across the globe, the lives of people have been significantly influenced by a wide range of diseases and morbidities. The approach of social marketing has been developed to encourage acceptance and voluntary uptake by the target population by assigning more responsibility to the health professionals. In the health sector, social marketing consists of four key components-product, place, price and promotion. However, utility of social marketing is not universal owing to the presence of multiple challenges and constraints. In conclusion, the approach of social marketing can play a significant role in motivating people to adopt healthy behavior, provided both policy makers and community stakeholders are involved in the planning & implementation phase.

Keywords: Social marketing, health, policy makers

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Introduction

Over the years across the globe, the lives of people have been significantly influenced by a wide range of diseases and morbidities.¹ This indirectly indicates that the policy makers should be well prepared to successfully counter the challenge emerging, especially because of the adoption of harmful behavior [1]. Different nations have implemented variable strategies depending upon the problems prevalent in their local settings [1,2]. The approach of social marketing has been developed to encourage acceptance and voluntary uptake by the target population by assigning more responsibility to the health professionals [2]. In general, the ultimate objective of social marketing is to improve public health standards so that health for all can be accomplished [1].

Social Marketing and Its Elements

Social marketing is a preventive strategy and should not be confused with marketing of hospital establishments as they advocate curative services for profit of shareholders and the resultant benefits may not always be beneficial to public health [1,3]. In the health sector, social marketing consists of four key components, namely product (like drug, sensitization session, etc.); place—where it will be made available to enhance its acceptance by the target group; the price—including the direct & indirect costs; and promotion strategies for the product or service [2,4,5].

Challenges and Constraints in Implementation of Social Marketing Technique

However, owing to the presence of limitations like the development of a sense of false belief among people about the utility/success of marketing product or behavior; health sector constraints (viz. weak infrastructure, lack of political will, scarce resources, financial constraints, etc.); consumers are not involved in decision making; if the message does not address the needs of the target audience; selection of inappropriate media, the utility of social marketing is not universal [1,3,4,6,7]. In addition, attributes like requirement of longer duration for bringing about a change in human behavior, and limited knowledge of marketing principles among health planners also influence the eventual outcome [1-3]. Furthermore, it is often difficult to evaluate the impact of social marketing strategies as it associated with changes in social & individual behavior & people attitude is complex and intangible [4,7].

Steps Involved in Social Marketing

The success of any social marketing strategy depends upon the preliminary work that has been put-in before its actual implementation in the community [8,9]. The approach of social marketing should consist of well-defined steps starting from the identification of health problem based on the discussion with the decision makers in the government / community & establishing methods for social marketing [2,4]. This is followed by prioritizing and implementing cost-effective strategy based on the projected realistic and achievable objectives/goals; regular analysis of marketing activities and formulating an effective social message (viz. specific, acceptable, easy to comprehend) for the target group [4,10]. At the same time, the organizers should ascertain the target audience for each marketing component, and then perform analysis with regard to each marketing strategy to identify the socio-cultural and religious resistance among the target groups so that subsequent strategy can be developed to overcome the resistance [10,11]. Subsequently, an appropriate marketing/distribution system should be selected to ensure maximum coverage among the target audience [10-12]. Finally, each of the domains of the social marketing technique should be evaluated on a periodic basis so that the impact of social messages on the target population and any midterm corrections (if needed) can be done [2,12].

Applications of Social Marketing in the Health Arena

The strategy of social marketing has been successful in multiple fields of health and allied sector [1,5], such as promoting maternal and child health care services [13]; fostering the use of family contraceptive measures, especially condom [14]; advocating modifications in human behavior like complying with traffic regulations or prevention of childhood obesity [6,15,16]; ensuring timely screening and early detection of cancer [17]; enhancing acceptance rates among community members with regard to vaccines and surgery [18,19]; encouraging use of oral rehydration salts to manage diarrhea [20,21]; and in augmenting the willingness of people towards a health promotion strategy [7,21]. Furthermore, online interventions have been employed in the social marketing campaigns to ensure change in health behavior and enhance the reach and coverage of the strategies [22].

Conclusion

In conclusion, the approach of social marketing can play a significant role in motivating people to adopt healthy behavior, provided both policy makers and community stakeholders are involved in the planning & implementation phase.

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